



Introduction

Having personal connections that are tied to current social studies issues sometimes provides the impetus for the development of research questions. I found myself in a predominantly Muslim nation during the outbreak of the United States (U.S.) bombings of Iraq. It was March, 2003, and I was visiting my future wife's residence in Sabah, Malaysia. On March 20, 2003, at approximately 5:35 a.m. Baghdad time, U.S. bombs fell on Baghdad, Iraq.

This initial attack was followed by days of severe bombing in Baghdad and other cities, coinciding with the invasion of U.S. and British ground forces in Iraq (Brunner, 2006). The unilateral actions were followed by huge protests in cities and towns across the U.S. and around the globe.

Before the bombing commenced, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir announced his opposition to a U.S.-led war in Iraq and would later denounce such war developments in several speeches before officially stepping down on October 31, 2003 from his role as Malaysia's leader after 22 years in office.

As a U.S. visitor to Malaysia and Sabah, I was concerned about how I would be received by local citizens, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Events during the onset of the war became a catalyst for gaining

insight into how the U.S. invasion of Iraq and, indeed, other momentous decisions of the U.S. government impacted lives of teachers and their students in Malaysia.

Taking into consideration the response of teachers in a Muslim-majority country, I sought to compare the reactions of the teachers in Malaysia with the perspectives of teachers in Mexico and Canada so larger comparisons could be drawn. Research for the study in Mexico was conducted in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, in a state that borders the U.S. The Canadian sampling of teachers took place in eastern Ontario in two communities also close to the U.S. border.

The key objective of the investigations in all three countries was to uncover attitudes and pedagogical comparisons of educators and their students regarding recent and current U.S. policies.

Undertaking Comparative Education

It should be noted that research was completed in Malaysia and Mexico during the George W. Bush presidency, whereas the data were collected in Canada within the first year of the Obama administration. Guiding the research in all three cases was the desire to uncover comparative aspects of social studies educators who teach about U.S. policies in their respective curricula.

Phillips and Schweisfurth (2006) have suggested, "to some extent everyone is a comparativist," and I set out to find the investigative aspects in those of us who seek to compare situations in familiar

settings with environs less recognizable. Epstein (2008) argues that comparative education is an important endeavor because through comparative education we better comprehend and gain insight into the nature of our own education here in the U.S. (p. 376). Crossley (2000) states that comparative and international education is a "field that has long been concerned with emancipatory themes and efforts to make a contribution to the improvement of education in practice" (p. 329).

Phillips and Ochs (2004) assert that "serious investigation of aspects of education in other countries seeks to identify what contributes to success in the hope that lessons might be learned which could have implications for policy development in the 'home' context" (p. 773). In this sense, it is important for the comparativist in all of us to identify further with internationalist perspectives.

Perspectives on Student Discussions

As this study commenced, questions emerged about how educators conducted and reported on their classroom discussions with students. Flinders (2005) argues that when educators dismiss student concerns, they are overlooking opportunities to engage students in important learning. My research sought to uncover the following:

What perspectives do educators in three countries—Sabah, Malaysia; Chihuahua, Mexico; and eastern Ontario, Canada—bring to classroom discussions of U.S. policies, including recent U.S.-led wars and anti-terrorism measures?

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COMPARING THE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATORS IN MALAYSIA MEXICO AND CANADA



What do these educators report as salient issues for students in their classroom discussions?

Recent research has indicated that there should be more candid, open dialogue on the effects of recent wars in U.S. classrooms (Davis, 2005; Flinders, 2005). According to Davis (2005), American students do not engage in discussions of recent wars as much as they should. Moreover, Davis maintains that “the school curriculum appears to be especially mute about this [the Iraq] war” (2005, p. 186). For the purposes of this study, I searched for perspectives that may have been lacking in the U.S. school curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

Educators were interviewed and surveyed in Malaysia, Mexico, and Canada to better understand discourses with regard to U.S. international policies in schools in those three countries. My purpose was to provide additional comparative insight to those who educate about similar issues in U.S. classrooms.

Among the problems to be addressed were: How is the U.S. curriculum enhanced through understandings of border pedagogy and transnational, comparative studies? Also, given the constraints placed on many U.S. educators today by the demands of high stakes testing, how can I impress upon others the validity of perspectives from transnational and comparative studies?

Malaysian, Mexican, and Canadian educators have an immense amount of



knowledge and pedagogy that is noteworthy and should be shared. How can educators in the U.S. incorporate this knowledge into a standards-based curriculum that can be highly prescriptive, such as the scope-and-sequence approach to teaching social studies? By carefully considering the perspectives of educators in our neighboring countries this research seeks to provide additional insight for teaching about major U.S. policies, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the “War on Terrorism.”

Indeed, some of these perspectives are needed as a means to fill the information void that has resulted from selective mainstream media censorship of viewpoints about war and terrorism that are presented to U.S. student audiences.

The following specific questions guided this research in the three countries:

1. How much time is devoted to the discussion of U.S. policies?
2. How much open discourse exists in classrooms?
3. What, if any, ideological differences are evident in classrooms during their discussions that included U.S. policies?
4. How have discussions of U.S. policies changed over recent years?
5. Why should others, and particularly Americans, be informed of perspectives in another country's social studies classrooms?

This study seeks to provide additional insight about the impact of U.S. international policies, including our nation's



recent courses of action. Thus, as indicated earlier, I sought ultimately to uncover the following in Malaysia, Mexico, and Canada:

What are the perceptions of educators and how do educators report on their classroom discussions of U.S. policies and, in particular, U.S.-led wars and anti-terrorism measures?

Theoretical Framework

The dynamics of what occurs in transnational classrooms can be considered through the lenses of border pedagogy. Giroux (1991) suggests that border pedagogy teaches students the skills of critical thinking, through debating power, meaning, and identity. The goals of transformative education are embedded within the discourses of border pedagogy (Garza, 2007; Giroux, 1991; Romo & Chavez, 2006).

According to Romo and Chavez (2006) border pedagogy encourages tolerance, ethical sophistication, and openness. Border pedagogy particularly engages learners in “multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their own narratives and histories, and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation” (p. 143).

Border pedagogy has implications

Photographs appearing with this article were taken in 2013 at the U.S.-Mexico border by Timothy G. Cashman.

for curricula in locales outside the border itself. Comparisons, contrasts, and reflections on transnational education help provide multifaceted learning. Garza (2007) found that educators developed mutual understandings after considering border pedagogies. Moreover, teachers and administrators discovered that they could inform and strengthen each other's educational practices through transnational, border engagement (Garza, 2007).

Education in Malaysia, Mexico, and Canada

Educators perform their responsibilities under unique conditions that are, in turn, influenced by each respective country's historical background, sociocultural conditions, and government policies. These circumstances influence the present day curriculum, and, in some cases, place constraints on the discourses that take place in classrooms.

Education in Malaysia

In Malaysia, education is the social institution that serves as the primary vehicle for upward mobility. Parents there spend relatively huge sums of money and sacrifice their own comforts in order to ensure their children are well educated. The government's stated philosophy of education is to produce a well-rounded Malaysian who is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced. Schools are directed to place an emphasis on respecting others' needs and requirements in Malaysia's multiethnic and multicultural society.

Another stated educational goal in Malaysia is the development of individuals who will "live harmoniously with others in society and who can contribute toward enhancing the quality of family life, society, and the nation" (Nasir, 2004). Officially, national unity is to be promoted through a common curriculum, the Malay language, and the national examination system.

Malaysian education is also expected to assist the authorities in countering any threats of terrorism (Nasir, 2004). To this end the Malaysian central government has sought to more strictly control the curriculum of Islamic religious schools—known as *madrasa* (Teo, 2004).

Education in Mexico

In Mexico, the national Secretary of Education (SEP) oversaw changes in the curriculum during the 1960s and 1970s so that students could take a more active role in learning (Erickson, 2003). Pedagogy was introduced that promoted more creativity, scientific inquiry, and critical thinking. The government has continued to promote modernization in education, including educational technologies; yet many broad goals remain unattained and adequate funding is needed (Rippberger & Staudt, 2003).

A key responsibility of the office of the SEP is to promote a sense of national identity and patriotism (Erickson, 2003). Mexican basic education is intended to provide students with fundamental knowledge and intellectual abilities (*Sistema Educativo de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, 2004). Accordingly, a main goal of public schools is to promote a sense of conscience in

social disciplines. In Mexico, the process of nation-building and construction of national identity remains a firm imperative, especially as the shadow of the powerful U.S. neighbor looms large (Levinson, 1998).

Mexico considers itself pluricultural because of its "distinct peoples, cultures, communities, and groups that share rights and obligations common to economic, political, and educational life, in spite of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic distinctions" (Morales & Caballero, 2002, p. 55).

The indigenous population in Mexico believes that beyond this government rhetoric there should be respect for cultural diversity that also eradicates various forms of discrimination and social inequality. There is a call for a new indigenous education that recognizes "universal philosophical and scientific principles, and at the same time, bases itself on its own historical traditions and knowledge, for example, teaching in the mother tongue" (Morales & Caballero, 2002, p. 56).

Education in Canada

Canadian educational policy, according to Davies and Issitt (2005), is determined at the provincial level, resulting in diverse policies throughout Canada. Additionally, these authors state that any social education in Canada has been marginalized within the greater educational context. With regard to classroom discussions of Canadian relations with the U.S., Osborne (2003) asserts that Canadian students may comprehend more about U.S. historical and political figures than they do of their own Canadian historical and political figures.

Earl (2006) notes divergent Canadian perspectives of the U.S. in Canadian society overall. The George W. Bush administration was mistrusted and immensely unpopular among a majority of the Canadian public (Ek, 2009). Obama's election as U.S. president in 2008 offered an opportunity for the strengthening of U.S. and Canada relations (Ek, 2009).

Attention to Prevailing Conditions

Thus, I was faced with the effects of distinct histories, sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts, and policymakers in each of the countries surveyed. What needed to be considered were the prevailing conditions for teaching about U.S. policies in the curricula of Malaysia, Mexico, and Canada.

Methodology

For the research conducted in Sabah, Malaysia, I interviewed and surveyed teachers who taught ages 15-to-18 in either



social studies courses at secondary and preparatory schools or “General Knowledge,” a required interdisciplinary national curriculum course at first-year Malaysian higher education institutes.

In Chihuahua, Mexico, I interviewed teachers and administrators at two school sites, including middle level educators at one school site and participants at a separate secondary school site.

For the Canadian comparative education component of this study, ten secondary social studies teachers in three secondary schools in two Eastern Ontario communities volunteered to be surveyed and interviewed.

My research methodologies followed Stake’s (2000) model for a substantive case study. Accordingly, I reflected on impressions, data, records, and salient elements at the observed sites. Open-ended questions were asked with regard to the research problem. Data were subsequently collected, noted for frequency, and categorized.

The next step was to develop interpretive explanations of observations, interviews, and archives (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis followed what Glesne (2011) refers to as thematic analysis, whereby the data were read many times in search of emerging themes or categories and subcategories. This also corresponds with Creswell’s (2007) description of the data analysis spiral, wherein the analysis process is iterative, including multiple coding phases.

For analysis of the overall case study, I took into consideration the recommendations of Yin (2003) for considering local meanings and foreshadowed meanings in their context. The work was highly reflective, with border pedagogy (Giroux, 1991) as a framework for uncovering contextual

conditions relevant to such phenomena (Yin, 2003).

For trustworthiness, interpretations of the data were clarified by paraphrasing or restating what I believed to be the intended positions and replies and verifying the interpretations were reflective of the participants’ true sentiments in the responses, either in direct conversation with the interviewees or through online communications. I also tested counterexamples of major themes to ensure interpretations were trustworthy (Maxwell, 2010).

The key categories of data that emerged were as follows:

1. Curriculum emphasis;
2. U. S. international policies; and
3. Comparative perspectives of government and society.

Data Collection in Malaysia

In Malaysia I selected teachers who worked with young adults aged 15-18 in either social studies courses or General Knowledge, a required interdisciplinary national curriculum course. Personal interviews and follow-up communications were conducted with nine educators who represented Malay, Chinese, Iban, Sino-Kadazan, Kadazan-Dusun, and Indian cultures. After initial face-to-face interviews over the period of a month, subsequent surveys and interviews were conducted via e-mail and telephone during the following six months.

Two interviewees responded in Malay. Fluent Malay speakers translated and interpreted the responses of these Malay-language respondents. The remaining seven participants communicated in English (see Table 1).

Sabah school administrators assisted me in setting up appointments, observations, interviews, and informal discussions. A local educator native speaker was enlisted to translate interview questions and responses from Malay to English.

Data Collection in Mexico

In Chihuahua, Mexico, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 25 social studies teachers and school administrators at two school sites. I was assisted by native Chihuahuans who helped me gain a level of trust and suggested delaying direct questions until more informal questions regarding the person’s birthplace, interests, number of years in the teaching profession, attitudes toward the profession, and other trust-building discourse had been established.

Trust proved to be an essential variable as far as gaining access to the true feelings of the participants. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Spanish, and a doctoral student who was present assisted with the translation of both verbal and non-verbal communications.

Data Collection in Canada

The research in Ontario, Canada focused on 10 secondary level teacher participants and their reporting of classroom discussions. The respondents included nine males and one female. Categories of analysis emerged from initial online communications, face-to-face interviews, follow-up online communications, and informal observations with the 10 teacher participants. All communications with the Ontario teachers were conducted in English.

Results

Curriculum Emphasis

In Malaysia, Mexico, and Canada instructional modes and time allotted to discussions of U.S. policies varied in terms of localized pedagogy. Malaysian teachers noted that they discussed the U.S.-led conflicts in Iraq in their courses anywhere from “approximately three to four times a month, especially during the Malay Language course” to facilitate dialogue about the impact of the ongoing war during almost every class meeting.

Mexican educators reported variable amounts of time spent in classroom discussions of U.S. international affairs. They reported that many of students had lived in the U.S. at some point. Invariably, when democratic systems were discussed, students offered their perspectives on policies of the U.S., largely based on their own

Table 1
Sabah, Malaysia, Participants’ Demographics or Characteristics

| <i>Variable/ Factor</i> | <i>Levels/Conditions</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-------------------------|--|----------|----------|
| Gender | Male | 4 | 44 |
| | Female | 5 | 56 |
| Position | Teacher | 9 | 100 |
| Teaching grade level | Social Studies, High School (Form 3, 4, 5) | 6 | 67 |
| | General Knowledge, High School (Form 6) | 3 | 33 |
| Ethnic background | Malay | 3 | 33 |
| | Kadazan-Dusun | 2 | 22 |
| | Chinese | 1 | 11 |
| | Sino-Kadazan | 1 | 11 |
| | Indian | 1 | 11 |
| | Iban | 1 | 11 |
| Religion | Muslim | 4 | 44 |
| | Christian | 3 | 33 |
| | Buddhist | 1 | 11 |
| | Hindu | 1 | 11 |

N=Number of Participants

personal experiences or family members' experiences and accounts.

Canadian participants maintained that the extent of discussions on U.S. international policies depended, in large part, on the provincial curriculum. Nonetheless, it was pointed out that considerable time (20% or more) in courses such as Geography, World Issues, and Canadian and International Law was devoted to discourses on U.S. policies, especially comparative Canadian and U.S. discussions. Moreover, a one semester course on U.S. History was a popular elective (See Table 2).

Malaysian educators stated that they facilitated open question-and-answer sessions or informal discussions on the U.S. involvement in international issues, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One Malaysian educator noted that such topics could not be broached unless the international issues appeared in the official syllabus.

Administrators and teachers in Chihuahua, Mexico, reported that students were engaged in discussions of the U.S.

when provided the opportunity. Some educators noted that the curriculum as it related to Mexico was addressed first, and dialogue on U.S. policies took place after the formal curriculum had been addressed. Nonetheless, teachers felt comparative history and social studies were vital for students, regardless of the curriculum. One educator emphasized that a key objective in her teaching is to have students develop understandings of interrelationships and international connections. Therefore, most discussions centered around Mexico first, but many discussions included U.S. affairs due to inter-connectedness with U.S. policies.

As there was considerable room for comparisons between Canada and the U.S. in the Ontario, Canada, curriculum, classroom dialogue included some discussion of U.S. policies. Ontario educators also compared U.S. and Canadian domestic policies and laws. For example, teachers reported that considerable time was spent discussing the differences between the U.S. and Canadian health care systems.

U.S. International Policies on War and Terrorism

All of the educators from Sabah, Malaysia, put forth that their students were against terrorism itself. Yet, the same teachers indicated that a majority of Malaysian students disagreed with the George W. Bush administration's stance toward Muslim countries. One teacher observed:

We debated on the purpose of the war in Iraq. Students said it's just for the oil and money, and that Bush wants to be the police for the world.

Students, reportedly, concurred with former Prime Minister Mahathir's tough stance against terrorism, but they expressed their opinions that the U.S. government was guilty of violating international laws through its unilateral actions.

Other Sabahan educators reported that their students were increasingly frustrated with the seemingly endless U.S. conflicts. Study participants offered that most students felt American policies towards Islamic

Table 2
Number of Participants and Frequency of Responses

| <i>Malaysia</i> | <i>Participants</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Open-ended question-and-answer sessions or informal discussions on the U. S. involvement in international issues were facilitated. | 9 | 9 |
| 2. Students were actively engaged in discussions on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. | 9 | 6 |
| 3. Students were against terrorism itself. | 9 | 9 |
| 4. A majority of Malaysian students disagreed with the Bush administration's stances toward Muslim countries. | 9 | 9 |
| 5. Students felt that U. S. policies towards Islamic countries are biased and designed to serve self-interests. | 9 | 6 |
| 6. Students argued that U. S. government was guilty of violating international laws with its unilateral actions. | 9 | 6 |
| <i>Chihuahua, Mexico</i> | | |
| 1. Mexico's national curriculum had to be addressed first; dialogue on U. S. policies took place after the formal curriculum had been addressed. | 25 | 17 |
| 2. Classroom discussions centered on students' feelings of family members residing and working in the U. S. | 25 | 25 |
| 3. Student learning was enhanced when students were engaged in the discussion of U. S. policies. | 25 | 25 |
| 4. Most students wanted an end to violence and felt that the War in Iraq was a war of "expansion and imperialism." | 25 | 25 |
| 5. Educators observed what they termed as superstitions and fatalism in students' explanations for strife in the U. S. | 25 | 7 |
| 6. Students' first impulses were to generalize with regard to U. S. policies. | 25 | 3 |
| <i>Ontario, Canada</i> | | |
| 1. The extent of discussions depended on the provincial curriculum. | 10 | 10 |
| 2. Considerable time was spent discussing differences between the U. S. and Canadian health care systems. | 10 | 9 |
| 3. Teachers noted an overwhelming lack of support for the War in Iraq; support for the War in Afghanistan was originally strong but has since waned. | 10 | 9 |
| 4. Teachers stated that students discuss the effects of international trade and NAFTA, including local factory closings because of the decisions of U. S.-based multinational mega-corporations. | 10 | 8 |
| 5. Teachers discussed recent U. S. and Canada treaty issues. | 10 | 9 |
| 6. Students ask questions about the level of crime and violence in the U. S. | 10 | 5 |
| 7. Canadian students are eager to discuss the reasons for Americans' lack of understanding of Canadian history, geography, and economics. | 10 | 10 |
| 8. Educators discussed their concerns of the polarizing crescendo in U. S. "dirty" politics and possible spill-over effects on their politics. | 10 | 7 |
| 9. Students resented the portrayal of Canadians in the U. S. media and textbooks. | 10 | 9 |
| 10. Students revealed a strong familiarity with U. S. media and pop culture. | 10 | 10 |
| 11. Canadian teachers reserved the right to critique U. S. government policies. | 10 | 10 |

countries were biased and “lopsided for the U.S.’ best self-interests.”

A key point of contention was that the U.S. government had overlooked the underlying causes of terrorism. Accordingly, one Sabahan teacher noted:

The war on terrorism is a must, but the most important thing to do is tackle the roots of terrorism. The students have mixed feelings on terrorism; some feel that terrorism happened because the people involved are not satisfied with certain issues in order to attract people’s attention seriously. America works very hard to curb terrorism but they still let other countries terrorize freely.

Educators in Chihuahua, Mexico, remarked that some of their students’ first impulses were to generalize; they reported there were students who simply stated that the U.S. makes decisions based on its oil-driven politics. Yet, some students asked poignant questions during classroom discussions. Accordingly, students sought answers to questions such as the following:

What about the U.S. and the killing of children and innocent people in Iraq?

Why doesn’t the U.S. spend money on other causes (besides war), such as hunger in Africa?

Why are there such differences in pay from multinational corporations in Mexico as compared to the U.S. (for the same work)?

After the September 11th attacks, Mexican students were heavily influenced by the events that unfolded on television. Many expressed their sorrow for the victims of the terrorist attacks in the U.S. At the time, most students had not yet contemplated the historical events that led to the terrorist attacks. More recently, many of the same individuals’ attitudes had changed; some viewed the American empire as “a modern-day Rome,” with many of the same problems and pressures. Some Mexican students resented the fact that the economic demands of the U.S. “affect everyone else in the world.”

Although Chihuahuan educators observed that students expressed their disapproval of terrorism, many students also argued that the U.S. is in a position to have continuing terrorist problems because of its policies. Classroom discussions centered on nationalism, religion, and power struggles as root causes of terrorism. Teachers and administrators indicated that students learned to compare, analyze, and reflect when such discussions were incorporated in the school curriculum.

Canadian perspectives and classroom discussions were in contrast with U.S.

government positions promoted in the U.S. itself. Teachers in Eastern Ontario noted that discussions reflected an overwhelming lack of support for the War in Iraq, while support for the War in Afghanistan was originally strong but waned as the death toll among Canadian soldiers increased.

Comparative Perspectives of Government and Society

Malaysian educators put forth that their discussions centered on the possibilities of Malaysia’s recent economic development and long-term stability being threatened by American military acts. Moderate and pro-Western predominantly Muslim nations have long been essential to the stability of world economics. Malaysia, as a rapidly developing moderate-Muslim majority country, has been a beacon of economic success in Southeast Asia since the early 1980s.

In Chihuahua, classroom discussions centered around the U.S. projecting itself as a model for racial equality, as a leader in addressing issues of pollution and global warming, and at the forefront in disaster preparedness and relief. However, educators readily noted that students perceived a wide scope of hypocrisy within American society, such as individuals of minority backgrounds being valued for their athleticism rather than other potential contributions to society, the U. S. as a perpetrator of carboniferous emissions and its present refusal to abide by the Kyoto Accords, and the lack of assistance for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. There were also concerns over discrimination in the U.S., which was something Mexican students, themselves, or family

members had experienced firsthand while living in the U.S.

Themes of globalization, roles of the U.S. media and pop culture, and comparisons and contrasts of Canadian and U.S. internal and domestic policies emerged during interviews with teachers from Ontario, Canada. These teachers stated that students and members of their communities discuss the effects of international trade and NAFTA, specifically, and observe in their local communities the loss of assembly line and industrial employment, including numerous factory closings because of the decisions of U.S.-based multinational mega-corporations. These educators also discussed recent U.S. and Canada treaty issues, such as the opening of the Northwest Passage in the Arctic Sea for petroleum exploration, which Canada ardently opposes.

The Canadian teachers also devoted considerable time discussing differences in the Canadian and U.S. health care systems. A commonly expressed sentiment was, “Why is the current debate even taking place in the U.S.?” Participants suggested that while the Canadian health care system has inherent problems, the shortcomings are not nearly as dire as portrayed in the U.S. media and by opponents of government-supported health care.

The educators posited that universal health care is considered a “given” in Canada, and younger Canadians take the system for granted. After all, based on a nationwide survey in Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting System named Tommy Douglas, who has been given credit for being the “Father of the Canadian Health System,” as the most famous Canadian in history.



Canadian educators reported that their students questioned and often resented the portrayal of Canadians in the U.S. media and textbooks. In particular, the portrayal of Canada's war engagement in U.S. textbooks, both historically and in the present, drew the ire of educators and their students.

There were open concerns among teacher participants in Canada about the escalating and polarizing crescendo of "dirty" politics in the U.S., including an apprehension that such campaigns and elections could have a spill-over effect on Canadian politics. Some educators argued that there was already plenty of evidence of copy-cat tactics being employed in the historically more reserved Canadian version of politics.

Teachers also reported that students engaged in debates on the differences between U.S. multiculturalism versus Canadian multiculturalism. Educators were quick to point out that racism exists in both countries, but the different histories and laws of each country have led to variances in racism found in locales and regions of each country.

Another key topic was the level of crime and violence in the U.S. as compared to Canada and other economically developed countries. Discussions centered on the history of the U.S. versus other countries, and how cultural norms vary in the two neighboring nations. Teachers reported students contended that a culture of violence has existed and developed within the U.S., particularly with respect to gun violence. Furthermore, discussions took place on how that culture of violence affects Canada now and potentially in the future.

Ontario teachers noted a strong familiarity and awareness of the U.S. media and pop culture. They mentioned the effects of U.S. pop culture, both on their students and

on Canadian society, in general, given the close proximity of the U.S. border.

Discussion

The lenses of border pedagogy provide that transnational, comparative studies can be used to promote academic achievement. Broader academic achievement implies successful life-long learning experiences and knowledge development that will surpass achievement associated with doing well on standardized tests.

Hahn (2001) recommends paying more attention to democratic discourse, decision making, and civic action in the curriculum. Students should feel empowered to have a voice as part of a democracy that is "continuously expanded into a world of new possibilities and opportunities for keeping justice and hope alive" (Giroux, 2009, p. 18). Students must be challenged by exploring transnational issues and making informed decisions with regard to those issues.

Hahn (2001) also encourages promoting dialogue with colleagues cross-nationally. Moreover, educators should better prepare students "for their roles as knowledgeable, caring, and effective civic actors in pluralistic democracies in a globally interdependent world" (Hahn, 2001, p. 21).

Teachers and their students need to engage in effective dialogue on policy issues facing the U.S. To better promote transnational understandings, the curriculum in U.S. schools should include significant and reasonable discussions on the effects of U.S. actions globally. For example, on the basis of my findings in this study, students can and should engage in comparative discourses on the following topics:

1. The legality of wars.
2. Treaty issues.
3. Immigration policies.

4. International perspectives of U.S. society and societal issues.

5. Crime, including white collar corruption, and violence.

6. Critiques of the mainstream media and pop culture.

As Giroux (1991) noted, border pedagogy works to "further create borderlands in which the diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power (p. 28)." According to Romo and Chavez (2006), border pedagogy

... works to decolonize and revitalize learning and teaching and engages students in multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their own narratives and histories, and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation. (p.143)

In this study, Malaysian, Mexican, and Canadian teachers and administrators expressed a desire to augment better understandings of life beyond their own domestic borders. They recommended more critical self-assessments of their own educational systems, and argued that all educational systems benefit from educational interchanges.

Some teachers noted that their students learned about themselves by studying other cultures in depth. U.S. educators, in turn, can assist their students to reflect on their personal knowledge bases and their nation's international policies by drawing comparisons with other societal perspectives. Research has indicated that without educational intervention adolescents tend to simply reflect opinions held by their own society (Garatti & Rudnitski, 2007). Moreover, discussions of the overall effects of U.S. decision-making and international policies in American classrooms can further students' self-knowledge, perspective-taking, critical thinking, and moral reasoning (Flinders, 2005).

Discourse in U.S. schools should include significant and reasonable discussions on the effects of U.S. actions globally. It is a fundamental imperative that times of conflict provide opportunities for contemplating the perspectives of others, especially those not directly engaged in the violence (Bender, 2002). Americans should learn of the sentiments of educators and students in other nations to provide a more complete picture of how unilateral actions of the U.S. government create chain reactions worldwide.

America's unilateral decision-making is, and should be, continually challenged (Young, 2002). As Bigelow (2006, p. 605)



argues, "We need to have the courage to challenge our students to question the narrow nationalism that is so deeply embedded in the traditional curriculum."

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that U.S. educators can learn from the narratives of educators in other countries. If genuine change is to occur, the present U.S. educational system must play a significant role in investigating and addressing the root causes of global conflicts.

I maintain that through the varied lenses of border pedagogy educators should look critically at policies that separate us and understand more about the "wedges that educational and power systems push between children and quality educational experiences" (Hampton, Liguori, & Rippberger, 2003, p. 9). Border pedagogy is a useful framework for transnational comparisons of curricula and a subsequent, broadened understanding of what curricula should embody.

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